

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 CEQ-01 OFA-01 COME-00 EPA-01 IO-11

NSF-01 OES-03 FEAEE-00 INT-05 CAB-02 OC-05 CCO-00 /101 W

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P R 301752Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7386

INFO DOT WASHDC PRIORITY

FAA WASHDC PRIORITY

FAA BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, FR, UK, US

SUBJ: CIVAIR: CONCORDE

1. SUMMARY--AIR FRANCE IS CONCERNED OVER LOW LOAD FACTORS ON INITIAL CONCORDE FLIGHTS. OPERATIONAL BACK-UP REQUIREMENTS RESTRICT FREQUENCY OF CONCORDE SERVICE AIR FRANCE CAN OFFER. THERE ARE IMPLICATIONS HERE RELEVANT TO CURRENT US DOMESTIC DEBATE OVER CONCORDE. END SUMMARY.

2. LE MONDE OF JAN. 29 PUBLISHED ARTICLE ENTITLED "EMPTY SEATS IN CONCORDE" WHICH WONDERS WHETHER CONCORDE WILL INFACt ATTRACT CLIENTELE COMPOSED OF OTHER THAN "SNOBS, CURIOSITY-SEEKERS AND MILLIONAIRES". ARTICLE NOTES THAT LOAD FACTOR ON INITIAL AIR FRANCE FLIGHTS TO RIO HAVE NOT BEEN IMPRESSIVE. PROSPECTIVE PASSENGERS WHO FLOCKED IN DROVES TO SIGN UP FOR RESERVATIONS WHEN CONCORDE

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TICKETS FIRST WENT ON SALE IN OCTOBER ARE NOW

STAYING AWAY IN DROVES, AND LE MONDE REPORTS
AIR FRANCE RESERVATIONS STAFF CONFESSES THAT SPACE
IS READILY AVAILABLE ON MOST FLIGHTS EXCEPT DURING
RIO CARNIVAL SEASON.

3. WE CHECKED WITH AIR FRANCE MANAGEMENT AND WERE TOLD THAT TRAFFIC HAS NOT BEEN UP TO EXPECTATIONS. INDEED, SUBJECT IS SOURCE OF "NO SMALL CONCERN" TO MANAGEMENT. WHILE THEY ADMIT THAT RIO SERVICE HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN AND IT IS PREMATURE TO MAKE ANY SWEEPING CONCLUSIONS, THEY ADMIT CANDIDLY THAT TRAFFIC IS WAY BELOW WHAT THEY THOUGHT WOULD BE ATTRACTED TO CONCORDE FROM THE OUTSET. AIR FRANCE COMPUTES LOAD FACTORS ONLY ON BASIS OF PAYING PASSENGERS. THEY GAVE US FOLLOWING FIGURES FOR CONCORDE FLIGHTS TO DATE. ON INAUGURAL FLIGHT JAN. 21 TO RIO, THERE WERE 91 PAYING PASSENGERS BUT ON RETURN LEG ONLY 50 PAYING PASSENGERS PLUS ABOUT TEN PSSSENGERS TRAVELING GRATIS. (IN OTHER WORDS, CONCORDE WAS LESS THAN THREE QUARTERS FULL EVEN ON RETURN LEG OF INAUGURAL FLIGHT.) FOR THE SECOND FLIGHT TO RIO ON JAN. 25, THERE WERE 76 PAYING PASSENGERS PARIS-RIO. (THIS INCLUDES PASSENGERS TO AND FROM DAKAR.) THE RETURN LEG WAS ESPECIALLY DISAPPOINTING WITH ONLY 39 PASSENGERS (OR LOAD FACTOR OF 39 PERCENT*) OF WHOM FIVE PASSENGERS WERE DAKAR-PARIS. (FACT THAT DAKAR WOULD GENERATE SO FEW PASSENGERS CAME AS REAL SHOCK TO AIR FRANCE.) PERFORMANCE ON JAN. 28 WAS A LITTLE BETTER, WITH 79 PASSENGERS PARIS-RIO (INCLUDING DAKAR TRAFFIC) AND 72 PASSENGERS ON RETURN LEG.

4. REASON FOR THESE DISAPPOINTING RESULTS, ACCORDING AIR FRANCE, AFTER "THOUSANDS" HAD QUEUED UP FOR RESERVATIONS EARLIER, WAS PROBABLY THAT MANY AMONG THOSE WHO RESERVED DID SO AS A LARK AND OTHERS WERE FRIGHTENED OFF BY THE FARE. IN ANY EVENT AIR FRANCE IS CLEARLY SHAKEN BY THE FACT THAT EVEN THE NOVELTY OR "HISTORIC" NATURE OF THE FIRST FEW LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONCORDE FLIGHTS HAS NOT ATTRACTED THE TRAFFIC, WHICH DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR THE FUTURE.

5. AIR FRANCE TOLD US THAT FIRST CLASS TRAFFIC ON THEIR SUBSONIC FLIGHTS TO RIO HAS NOT SUFFERED SINCE BEGINNING OF CONCORDE SERVICE. ON THE CONTRARY, THEIR SUBSONIC FIRST CLASS TRAFFIC TO RIO OVER THAT PERIOD HAS INCREASED. THIS LEADS

AIR FRANCE TO CONCLUDE THAT THUS FAR CONCORDE HAS GENERATED NEW TRAFFIC, THOUGH WHETHER THIS IS A TREND THAT WILL CONTINUE IS ANOTHER STORY.

6. IN DISCUSSING OPENING OF CONCORDE SERVICE, AIR FRANCE REP MENTIONED TO US SOMETHING OF WHICH WE HAD BEEN UNAWARE, NAMELY, FOR ALL CONCORDE DEPARTURES FROM PARIS AIR FRANCE HAS A

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BACK-UP CONCORDE AVAILABLE, FULLY FUELED AND WITH CREW AT THE READY. REASON, HE SAID, WAS THAT PASSENGER CHOOSING CONCORDE SERVICE IS PAYING FOR RAPID, TIME-SAVING FLIGHT AND SO IN CASE OF LAST-MINUTE MECHANICAL OR OTHER DIFFICULTIES AIR FRANCE SIMPLY CANNOT SUBSTITUTE 747 OR OTHER SUBSONIC AIRCRAFT IN PLACE OF CONCORDE. THIS RESTRICTS,

THEREFORE, FREQUENCY AIR FRANCE
WILL BE ABLE TO OFFER ON ITS CONCORDE ROUTES WITH
TOTAL OF ONLY FOUR AIRCRAFT. CARACAS SERVICE TO
BE INAUGURATED APRIL 9, FOR EXAMPLE, WILL OPERATE
ONLY ONCE WEEKLY BECAUSE NEED FOR BACK-UP CONCORDE
TO BE ABLE TO SUPPORT THIS AS WELL AS RIO SERVICE
WILL MAKE MORE THAN ONE CARACAS FLIGHT OPERATIONALLY
IMPOSSIBLE. (COMMENT: IT MIGHT ALSO BE, OF COURSE,
THAT CARACAS TRAFFIC WOULD NOT SUPPORT MUCH
GREATER FREQUENCY.)
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7. COMMENT: ABOVE, IT SEEMS TO US, HAS SOME RELEVANCE
TO CURRENT US DOMESTIC DEBATE OVER CONCORDE
AS REGARDS THREAT CONCORDE MIGHT POSE
TO OUR OWN CARRIERS THROUGH TRAFFIC DIVERSION ON
THE NORTH ATLANTIC AND FEARS EXPRESSED BY SOME
CONCORDE CRITICS (E.G, PARIS 1569) THAT AUTHORIZATION
OF LIMITED SERVICE TO US WOULD BE FOOT IN THE DOOR
FOR EXPANDED SERVICE THEREAFTER. AIR FRANCE WOULD
CERTAINLY HAVE NO INTEREST IN INCREASING CONCORDE
FREQUENCIES ON NORTH ATLANTIC IF LOAD FACTORS FOR
ITS LIMITED SERVICE SHOULD PROVE TO BE
DISAPPOINTINGLY LOW. OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENT
FOR AVAILABILITY BACK-UP CONCORDE FOR DEPARTURES
TO RIO, CARACAS, WASHINGTON, DC AND NEW YORK WOULD
CERTAINLY NOT GIVE AIR FRANCE MUCH FLEXIBILITY
TO AUGMENT ITS NORTH ATLANTIC FREQUENCIES WITH A
TOTAL CONCORDE FLEET OF ONLY FOUR AIRCRAFT. TO BE
SURE, THIS CALCULATION COULD BE UPSET IF THE FIVE
CONCORDES STILL UNDER OPTION FOUND NO TAKERS AND
GOF WERE TO TRY TO FOIST ONE OR MORE OF THESE OFF
ON AIR FRANCE, THOUGH THIS SEEMS HIGHLY UNLIKELY
TODAY. AND, OF COURSE, IF LOAD FACTORS ON RIO SERVICE
SHOW NO IMPROVEMENT (AND WE NOTE FROM LONDON 1415
LOW LOAD FACTORS ON BRITISH AIRWAYS' SERVICE TO
BAHRAIN, WHICH COMES AS NO SURPRISE), THEN GOF WILL
HAVE AN EVEN WEAKER CASE THAN IT HAS TODAY IN
ARGUING WITH THE BRITISH FOR DECISION ON
CONTINUATION OF THE CONCORDE PROGRAM (PARIS 2768).
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